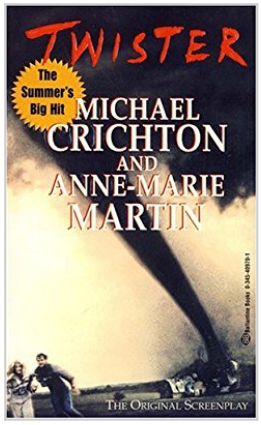

Twister

By Michael Crichton, Anne-Marie Martin

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Editorial Review

Twister: Introduction

There have been thunderstorms during the day, with clouds hanging low and dark over the land. Now, in late afternoon, the wind suddenly drops. The air becomes oppressively still.

There is silence, and a feeling of foreboding.

The sky turns ugly, shades of purple or green. In the distance, a faint, lacy whirl of dust spins across the ground.

A tornado is forming.

Now a gray condensation funnel appears from the clouds above. It descends tentatively toward the ground, a fragile ropelike finger.

Stretching downward, in silence.

As it touches the ground, the funnel begins to rotate faster. There is a deep rumbling sound, like the roar of an enormous freight train, as the tornado moves over the land, churning dust and debris at its base.

What happens next, no one can predict.

Most tornadoes lose power within a few minutes, the funnel shrinking and tilting forward, roping out--vanishing as quickly as they have come.

But at other times, the tornado on the ground grows steadily in strength and roaring power. The base widens from a hundred yards to a diameter of half a mile or more. Winds reach 300 miles an hour. Such huge tornadoes may stay on the ground for an hour, leaving behind a path of devastation a hundred miles long, before they, too, finally dissipate and disappear back into the sky.

What makes one tornado last for a few seconds, and another last for an hour, causing death and destruction? No one really knows. Scientists have made complex computer models, laboratory simulations, and observations on the ground.

But still, even today, no one really knows.

The United States has more tornadoes than any nation on Earth. Although tornadoes occur everywhere on our planet, the geography of the U.S. is uniquely suited for tornado formation. Each spring, cold, dry air coming down from Canada meets war, wet air flowing up from the Gulf of Mexico. These weather fronts meet over the broad, flat prairies of the central United States, producing enormous thunderclouds of great beauty and power. Some of these thunderclouds--perhaps one in a thousand--will produce tornadoes.

In Kansas, Oklahoma, and Texas, tornadoes occur so commonly that the area has long been known as "Tornado Alley." The frequency of tornadoes in the central states has made this the ideal place for scientists to observe tornado formation. Each spring, a group of scientists known as storm chasers travel up and down this region, searching for tornadoes and studying them in a variety of ways.

These storm chasers are unusual people. They combine the rigor of hard scientists with the instincts of naturalists and hunters. Their season is short, only a few months each year. Their work is fast-paced and sometimes dangerous, for they are studying the most unpredictable--and potentially deadly--phenomena of nature. Above all, they must be patient, for in a good year, they will witness two, or perhaps three, tornadoes. In a bad year, they will see none at all.

More than a thousand tornadoes touch down in the United States every year, but most are fleeting, lasting only a few minutes. Many occur at night, or in remote regions, and they are never seen by anyone at all. Historically, the elusive nature of tornadoes has meant that they have rarely been filmed. Most newsreel footage showed the aftermath, the shattered towns and destroyed farmhouses, long after the tornado itself had vanished. In fact, prior to 1965, only two tornadoes were ever recorded by movie cameras. Tornadoes might be mysterious and feared, but they were also largely unseen. Eyewitness accounts of their behavior were wild, and wildly conflicting.

All that changed with the advent of home video cameras. By the late 1980s, these cameras were common in households across the country, and soon, literally hundreds of home videos began to record tornadoes of all sorts. From this wealth of new visual information came new scientific understanding. The behavior of tornadoes began to be much better understood, at least descriptively. For example, tornadoes were recognized to have a distinct life cycle, marked by distinct visual stages.

At the same time, the scientific approach to tornadoes became more sophisticated. A nationwide system of Doppler radar gave storm chasers much better information about where a tornado was likely to occur. And the chasers themselves employed more advanced techniques, portable Doppler radars, particle photogrammetry, and even, in the case of pioneer Howard Bluestein, a special instrument pack called TOTO (for Totable Tornado Observatory), which was intended to be carried on the back of a truck, placed in the path of the tornado, and taken up inside the funnel.

The work of the storm chasers and the visual drama of the tornadoes themselves had long interested my wife, Anne-Marie Martin, who from time to time would announce that somebody should make a movie on the subject. My answer was always the same: It's a good subject, but what's the story? In late 1993, she argued for a very simple structure, a romantic triangle set against the background of a race to place an instrument pack in a tornado. She felt the tension of chasing tornadoes would lead people to behave in an exaggerated fashion--to say things they wouldn't ordinarily say, and do things they wouldn't ordinarily do. She proposed a short, intense time-course for the story, no more than a day or two. And she argued for a lot of scientific dialogue which would carry undercurrents of personal meaning behind the technical surface. I was doubtful about this, because I had tried exactly that procedure in a script called "ER," and so far, no one had made it.

Nevertheless, her idea took hold. From the beginning, the subject seemed to me inherently visual, and therefore should be a script, not a book. Tornadoes are an ideal film subject, because unlike most meteorological phenomena, they are small enough to fit within the film frame, and they last a short time, changing rapidly. By comparison, a hurricane is hundreds of miles across, too big to see in a single image, and it goes on for hours, with little change. Tornadoes are much more contained, and visually compelling.

We were further encouraged by early research that showed the premise was valid. Not only had real

scientists attempted to put instrument packs into funnels, but there had been many recorded episodes when so-called outbreaks of tornadoes occurred--as many as a hundred tornadoes touching down in a single day, often only a few minutes apart. That was what we required for our story, and it did indeed happen. It wasn't even rare: outbreaks of forty or more tornadoes had occurred seven times in the past ten years. The worst recorded outbreak, according to Ted Fujita, had taken place in April 1974, when 148 tornadoes touched down in a day, producing 2,400 miles of damage path.

So it seemed as if the story was possible. Eventually, with some trepidation, we decided to write the script together, and we began in January 1994. It was not clear to either of us how this would work out, or whether it would work at all. We had plenty of advice that collaboration was a good way to end a marriage. But, as it turned out, we had an easy time working together; the structure was unusually clear, dictating what should happen next. And, invariably, we drew our episodes and details from actual recorded events, making up nothing. This was important because tornadoes are so inherently dramatic, it is easy to become excessive in the usual Hollywood manner, and we wanted the incidents to remain true to underlying reality.

That reality was always worrisome. Because what we didn't know, during the spring and summer of 1994, was whether it would be possible to film the sequences we were so cheerfully writing. We were relying on computer graphics to accomplish this, but it is far more difficult to make a tornado in a computer than a dinosaur. On the other hand, George Lucas's Industrial Light and Magic is one of the most continuously successful R&D operations in American history. Thus, we blithely assumed that ILM's rapid advances in computer graphics would continue, so that by the time we were finished writing, it would be possible to simulate tornadic motion onscreen. And that turned out to be true. We saw a film test in January 1995 that was chilling in its verisimilitude.

As is so often the case with big Hollywood movies, other hands took over the project, and moved it off in other directions. What audiences will see includes the work of many other, uncredited writers, but readers may be interested to see how the project appeared at an earlier time.

Meanwhile, in the real world, Howard Bluestein and other researchers had long since abandoned their attempts to place an instrument pack in a tornado funnel. They tried for five seasons, and never succeeded--although they did determine that TOTO was too light, and too easy to tip over in tornadic wings. But we have the greatest admiration for the tenacity and daring of the real storm chasers, and, as we wrote this screenplay, we hoped that they would be amused to find that in the movies, at least, their attempts met with success.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Clarence Liller:

The book Twister can give more knowledge and information about everything you want. Exactly why must we leave the good thing like a book Twister? Wide variety you have a different opinion about guide. But one aim that book can give many info for us. It is absolutely suitable. Right now, try to closer together with your book. Knowledge or info that you take for that, it is possible to give for each other; you could share all of these. Book Twister has simple shape however you know: it has great and big function for you. You can look the enormous world by open up and read a publication. So it is very wonderful.

Martha McKee:

Playing with family in a park, coming to see the sea world or hanging out with buddies is thing that usually you could have done when you have spare time, subsequently why you don't try factor that really opposite from that. One activity that make you not sensation tired but still relaxing, trilling like on roller coaster you are ride on and with addition of information. Even you love Twister, it is possible to enjoy both. It is very good combination right, you still want to miss it? What kind of hang-out type is it? Oh come on its mind hangout fellas. What? Still don't buy it, oh come on its known as reading friends.

Douglas Holmes:

The book untitled Twister contain a lot of information on the item. The writer explains her idea with easy technique. The language is very clear to see all the people, so do definitely not worry, you can easy to read this. The book was authored by famous author. The author gives you in the new age of literary works. It is easy to read this book because you can read on your smart phone, or gadget, so you can read the book within anywhere and anytime. If you want to buy the e-book, you can available their official web-site and order it. Have a nice learn.

Thomas Hill:

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